

February 21, 2010/Matthew 17:1-13 (ESV¹)

Mat 17:1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

the best guess seems to be that they are on one of the lower peaks of Mount Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi ... Luke tells us that Jesus is now here to pray ... remember that we've just heard Peter first make the magnificent confession of Jesus as both Christ and God, followed by his foolish suggestion that Jesus shouldn't suffer, for which Jesus rebukes him and tells him that both Christ and His followers will of necessity put to death their own selfish interests and choose the will of God ... France: "The one who is to suffer is God's chosen Messiah, his Son, whose true nature is revealed in divine glory." ... Ryle: "The corner of the veil was lifted up, to show them their Master's true dignity." ... Calvin quite eloquently makes the point that this episode will later serve to highlight for the disciples the truth that Jesus went willingly to the cross, that this is the glorious One, who indeed could have completely obliterated all opposition if that was His way ... He was going to suffer, but not out of weakness, but rather strength ...

Mat 17:2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

he was "transfigured"/transformed/changed ... Mark and Luke say

Mar 9:3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.

Luk 9:29 And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.

what can one say? ... the disciples must have had their breath taken away ... it's one thing to have some understanding that Jesus is the Messiah and even see him do the miraculous ... but it's quite another to see Him take on a completely unworldly appearance ...

Mat 17:3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Moses ... the law giver ... the one that led the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt ... the one that met God face to face in a cloud on Mount Sinai ... Elijah, the prophet widely held by the Jews to have been the greatest of the prophets ... the one that was to appear to prepare the way for Messiah ... the one that didn't suffer death, but was taken up to God's presence in a chariot of fire ... these are the ones talking with Jesus ...

Luke says

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Luk 9:30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah,

Luk 9:31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Jesus, the fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets is talking with Moses and Elijah about His impending Passion ... the word "departure" is the word "exodus" ... Moses the leader of the exodus from Egypt is speaking with the Son of God about His provision for us, an exodus from our bondage to sin, hell and the grave ...

Peter again blurts out ... Luke indicates that it was as Moses and Elijah were leaving that Peter jumps in ... there's a whole lesson in itself there about our human desire to remain forever on the mountaintop ...

Mat 17:4 And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Peter is babbling ... what he proposes is just silly ... what real purpose could it serve? ... besides, it is just wrong-headed ...

Mar 9:6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

he wants to prolong this experience ... but in his babbling, he says something really quite inappropriate ... he is presumptuous in even figuring that he has a place to butt in here ... he really ought to be in a "speak when spoken to" mode ... but even worse, Peter unthinkingly lumps Jesus together with Moses and Elijah ... should he make three lean-tos on the mountainside? ... there are 3 important people here, right? ... the answer of the Father is clear ...

Mat 17:5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

here is the Shekinah glory of God ... the visible presence of the Father that led the Israelites in the wilderness and filled Solomon's temple at its dedication ... and the voice says "it's my Son that you ought to be paying attention to here!" ... this is not Jesus and 2 equals discussing strategy here ... these are representatives of the Law and Prophets speaking as creatures, with the very fulfillment of the Law and Prophets!" ... the Father speaks of Jesus in exactly the terms used at His baptism in **Matt 3:17** ... and then adds "listen to Him" ...

Ryle: " 'Hear ye Him.' Let us see, in these words, a striking lesson to the whole Church of Christ. There is a constant tendency in human nature to 'hear man.' Bishops, priests, deacons, popes, cardinals, councils, Presbyterian preachers, and independent ministers, are continually exalted to a place which God never intended them to fill, and made practically to usurp the honour of Christ. Against this tendency let us all watch, and be on our guard. Let these solemn words of the vision ever ring in our ears: 'Hear ye Christ.'

The best of men, are only men at their very best. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles,—martyrs, fathers, reformers, puritans,—all, all are sinners, who need a Saviour: holy, useful, honourable in their place,—but sinners after all. They must never be allowed to stand between us and Christ. He alone is 'the Son, in whom the Father is well pleased;' He alone is sealed and appointed to give the bread of life; He alone has the keys in His hands: 'God over all, blessed for ever.' (**Romans 9:5.**) Let us take heed that we hear His voice, and follow Him; let us value all religious teaching just in proportion as it leads us to Jesus. The sum and substance of saving religion is to 'hear Christ.'"

this is consistent with what God told the people of Israel long before through Moses ...

Deu 18:15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen--

Mat 17:6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

no kidding ... do you think one might remember this for a while? ... we hear about it from the pens of both Peter and John ...

Joh 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2Pe 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

2Pe 1:17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"

2Pe 1:18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

as Pastor Gary has emphasized lately, post-moderns are generally too casual in their thinking about being in the presence of God ... indeed except for the presence and sponsorship of our Savior the Lord Jesus, it would be a completely terrifying prospect ...

Mat 17:7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."

rise and have no fear ... unless Jesus is divine, this is empty ... He must supply what is needed here, or this is really no help ... thank God, He has the goods and has compassion for us His sheep ...

Mat 17:8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

this is loaded with symbolism ... they see only Jesus ... not Moses, not Elijah ... it is He who is supreme and it is He who can bring them safely into the presence of the Father ...

Mat 17:9 And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

this experience was powerful confirmation to Peter, James and John that Jesus was indeed the Son of God ... but, again, it was not time to broadcast their experience ... *they* needed to have the whole picture ... and besides, after the crucifixion and resurrection there is no possibility of the masses seeing Jesus as the leader of a national uprising ... He's literally not there to rally around as a guerrilla leader ...

Mat 17:10 And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?"

no doubt in their minds now, this is Messiah ... but then how does the teaching of the return of Elijah fit in, they ask ... especially if Elijah is to come and set things aright for Messiah ... surely fixing things up in moral terms would preclude the murder of Messiah, wouldn't it? ... and they've just seen Elijah, doesn't that mean the time is right now? ...

Mat 17:11 He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things.

Mat 17:12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands."

Messiah will fare no better than did His forerunner ... the powers that be killed John the Baptist ... they will kill the Messiah ... they didn't recognize John in the role of Elijah, they won't recognize Jesus, the Messiah ... neither John nor Jesus fit with the popular expectations ...

Mat 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

so we have in this passage the disciples really beginning to come to terms with Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah ... they're pointed to His uniqueness and given some understanding of the suffering and selfless nature of His Messiahship ...